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15 March 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR: DD/P, Frank G. Wisner

SUBJECT : Juan Jose AREVALO

1. A successful approach to Juan Jose AREVALO, former President of Guatemala, with a view toward restoring his independence and self-confidence could be of significant political and psychological assistance to PBSUCCESS.
2. While largely divorced from actual Guatemalan affairs, AREVALO serves as (in George Kennan's phrase) the "fig-leaf" of Guatemalan political respectability with the left-of-center forces both in the Hemisphere and in Guatemala itself. Stripped of AREVALO's silent or semi-silent support, the Guatemalan regime would very likely be faced with increased political suspicion from the non-Communist left in the Hemisphere and, inside Guatemala, the leftist, pro-Government politicians would presumably be shaken to their flimsy ideological roots.
3. It appears proper to classify AREVALO as a second-rate politician-theoretician. He is a teacher, reader and thinker, and his ideological claim to fame consists of his now almost forgotten creed of "spiritual socialism." (The term is almost self-explanatory: material progress without neglect of spiritual values.) But there is much of the half-baked, the unfinished, the inconclusive about the creed, and so is there in AREVALO's life. Many years before his Presidency, he lived in exile, and since his term of office, he has been in polite exile again. The picture thus emerges of a wandering man and mind, restless, unsure, seeking and not finding.
4. It is believed that AREVALO could be successfully approached and defected, strange as it may sound, by a man of sufficient intelligence, sincerity and stature to give AREVALO both direction in his life and a dream on which to concentrate: in other words, a man who could give AREVALO something approaching peace.
5. The elements of such an approach would have to be both theoretical and concrete. The man making the approach would have to discuss AREVALO's theories and perfect them to a point that AREVALO himself could not; he would have to show AREVALO that which AREVALO seems to doubt, namely that his thought has a place in the grand and global scheme of things; he would have to give AREVALO orientation. Secondly, the man would have to offer AREVALO a single, visionary yet practical job to do--perhaps the development of the Peten area in Guatemala.

cc: C. Tracy Barnes

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